

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA
FLORENCE DIVISION

Terry Bernard Brantley,
PETITIONER

v.

United States of America,
RESPONDENT

Crim. No. 4:12-cr-00746-TLW-1
C/A No. 4:14-cv-01747-TLW

Order

This matter comes before the Court for consideration of the pro se petition to vacate, set aside, or correct a sentence pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2255 filed by Petitioner Terry Bernard Brantley. For the reasons stated below, the Court dismisses the petition.

I. Factual and Procedural History

Petitioner pled guilty to a charge of Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute 28 Grams or More of Cocaine Base, and he was sentenced to 204 months incarceration pursuant to a Rule 11(c)(1)(C) agreement. ECF Nos. 119, 157. At his sentencing, he filed a written waiver of appeal. ECF No. 153. He did not file a direct appeal.

Petitioner timely filed this § 2255 petition, asserting that his counsel was ineffective in failing to object to his drug weight and criminal history category. ECF No. 178. The Government filed a response in opposition and motion for summary judgment. ECF Nos. 187, 188. He was advised of his right to file a response to the Government's motion for summary judgment, ECF No. 189, but he failed to do so.

This matter is now ripe for decision.

II. 28 U.S.C. § 2255

Title 28, Section 2255 of the United States Code provides that a prisoner in custody under sentence of a federal court may file a petition in the court that imposed the sentence to vacate, set aside, or correct the sentence. A petitioner is entitled to relief under § 2255 if he proves by a preponderance of the evidence one of the following: (1) that the sentence was imposed in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States; (2) that the court was without jurisdiction to impose such sentence; (3) that the sentence was in excess of the maximum authorized by law; or (4) that the sentence is otherwise subject to collateral attack. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 2255(a); *Miller v. United States*, 261 F.2d 546, 547 (4th Cir. 1958) (per curiam). “The scope of review of non-constitutional error is more limited than that of constitutional error; a non-constitutional error does not provide a basis for collateral attack unless it involves ‘a fundamental defect which inherently results in a complete miscarriage of justice,’ or is ‘inconsistent with the rudimentary demands of fair procedure.’” *Leano v. United States*, 334 F. Supp. 2d 885, 890 (D.S.C. 2004) (quoting *United States v. Mikalajunas*, 186 F.3d 490, 495–96 (4th Cir. 1999)).

In deciding a § 2255 petition, a court need not hold a hearing if “the motion and the files and records of the case conclusively show that the prisoner is entitled to no relief.” 28 U.S.C. § 2255(b). The Court has thoroughly reviewed the motions, files, and records in this case, liberally construing Petitioner’s filings, and finds that no hearing is necessary.

III. Standard of Review

Petitioner brings this motion *pro se*. Courts are required to construe liberally pleadings filed by *pro se* litigants to allow for the development of potentially meritorious claims. *See Boag v. MacDougall*, 454 U.S. 364, 365 (1982) (per curiam). These pleadings are held to a less stringent

standard than those drafted by attorneys. *See Gordon v. Leake*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978). However, “[t]he ‘special judicial solicitude’ with which a district court should view such *pro se* complaints does not transform the court into an advocate. Only those questions which are squarely presented to a court may properly be addressed.” *Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, 391 (4th Cir. 1990).

The Government filed a motion for summary judgment. “The court shall grant summary judgment if the movant shows that there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(a). At the summary judgment stage, the Court must view the evidence in the light most favorable to the non-moving party and draw all justifiable inferences in its favor. *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby Inc.*, 447 U.S. 242, 255 (1986).

IV. Discussion

To prevail on an ineffective assistance claim, Petitioner must show (1) that counsel’s acts or omissions fell below an objective standard of reasonableness; and (2) that there is a reasonable probability that, but for counsel’s errors, the result of the proceeding would have been different. *See Strickland v. Washington*, 466 U.S. 668, 687–88, 694 (1984); *Hooper v. Garraghty*, 845 F.2d 471, 475 (4th Cir. 1988). Failure of proof on either prong ends the matter. *United States v. Roane*, 378 F.3d 382, 404 (4th Cir. 2004). There is “a strong presumption that counsel’s conduct falls within the wide range of professional assistance,” and Petitioner has the burden of overcoming this presumption. *Strickland*, 466 U.S. at 689. An ineffective assistance of counsel allegation requires the submission of specific facts in support of the claim. *See United States v. Witherspoon*, 231 F.3d 923, 926 (4th Cir. 2000).

There is no merit to this petition. Both of Petitioner’s ineffective assistance of counsel

claims relate to his guideline calculation, but he was sentenced pursuant to the Rule 11(c)(1)C agreement contained in his plea agreement, rather than the guidelines. *See, e.g., United States v. Ford*, 491 F. App'x 433, 434 (4th Cir. 2012) ("[A] sentence imposed pursuant to a Rule 11(c)(1)(C) plea agreement is contractual and not based upon the Guidelines."). Accordingly, even if he were correct that his attorney was ineffective in failing to object to the drug weight and criminal history category, he would not be entitled to relief because the result of the proceeding would not have been different. *See Strickland*, 466 U.S. at 694.

V. Conclusion

For the reasons stated, the Government's Motion for Summary Judgment, ECF No. 188, is **GRANTED** and Petitioner's petition for relief pursuant to § 2255, ECF No. 178, is **DENIED**. This action is hereby **DISMISSED**.

The Court has reviewed this petition in accordance with Rule 11 of the Rules Governing Section 2255 Proceedings. In order for the Court to issue a certificate of appealability, Rule 11 requires that Petitioner satisfy the requirements of 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2), which in turn requires that she "has made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right." The Court concludes that she has not made such a showing, and it is therefore not appropriate to issue a certificate of appealability as to the issues raised in this petition. Petitioner is advised that she may seek a certificate from the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals under Rule 22 of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/ Terry L. Wooten

Terry L. Wooten

Chief United States District Judge

January 30, 2017
Columbia, South Carolina